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—MASTERS IN ART

Bastien-Lepage

FRENCH SCHOOL

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MASTERS IN ART PLATE I
PHOTOGRAPH BY BRAUN, CLEMENT & CO

[467]

BASTIEN-LEPAGE
JOAN OF ARC
PROPERTY OF ERWIN DAVIS, NEW YORK.



MASTERS IN ART - PLATE II
PHOTOGRAPH BY BRAUN, CLÉMENT & C. E.
[469]

BASTIEN-LEPAGE
LOVE IN THE VILLAGE
PROPERTY OF GEORGES PETIT, PARIS



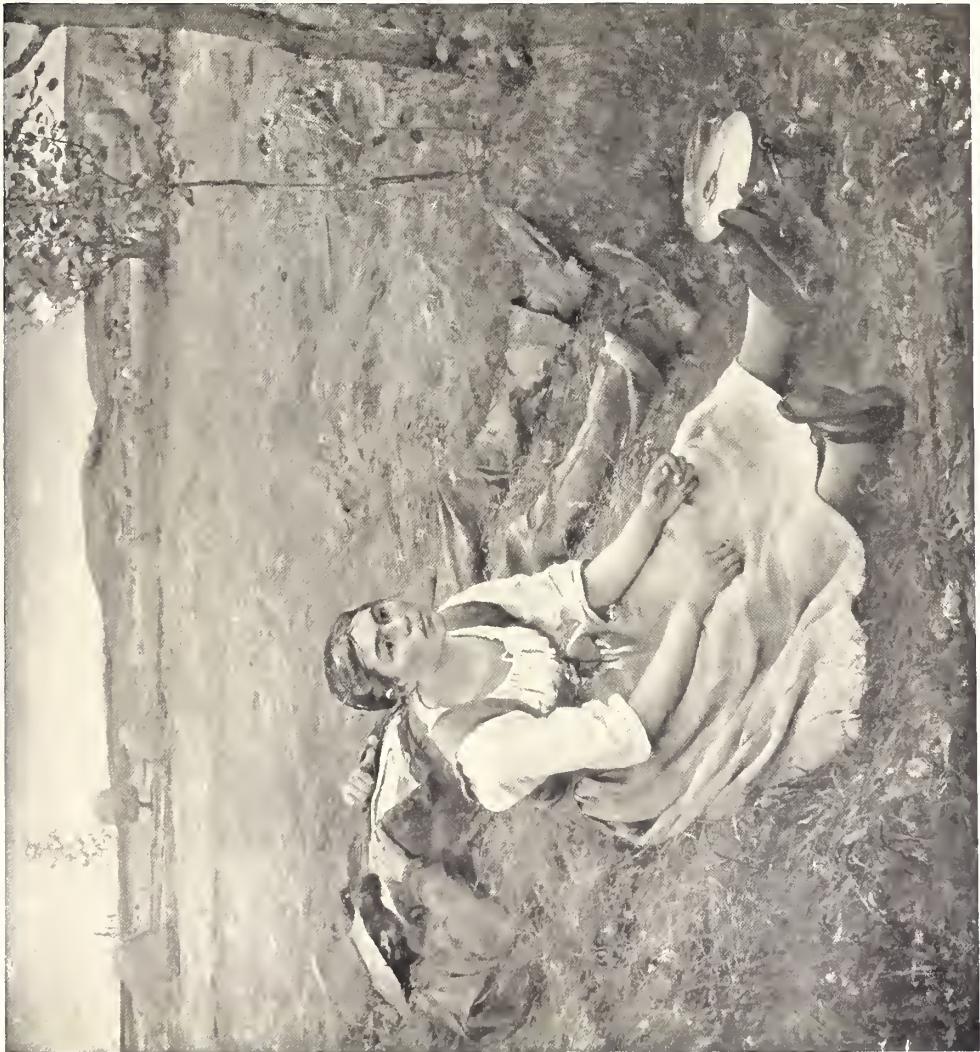


A SARAH HARD

JULES BASTIEN-LEPAGE 1879



MASTERS IN ART PLATE VI
PHOTOGRAPH BY BRAUN, CLÉMENT & CIE
[477]



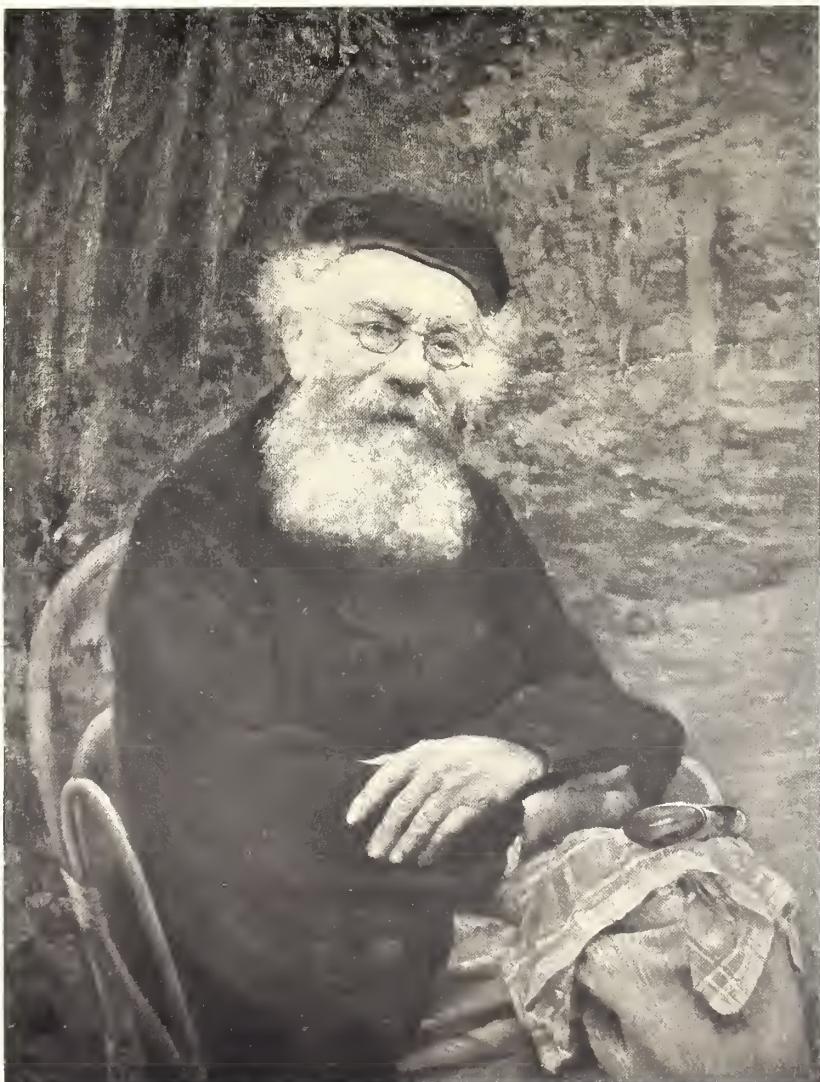
MASHERS IN ART PLATE VII
PHOTOGRAPH BY BRAUN, CLÉMENT & CIE
[479]

BASTIEN-LEPAGE
THE HAYMARKET
LUXEMBOURG, PARIS





BASTIEN - LEPAGE . '25



Jules Bastien-Lepage

BORN 1848: DIED 1884

FRENCH SCHOOL

JULES BASTIEN-LEPAGE was born in Damvillers in the department of the Meuse, in France, on November 1, 1848. His parents were sufficiently poor, of a grade just above the peasants. His surname, Bastien-Lepage, was made up of his mother's surname, "Lepage," hyphenated with the name "Bastien," belonging to his father. He was brought up in the rude life of the farm, and learned in that way to know, to understand, and love the peasant character in a way which is strongly shown in his later work. It is unfortunate that this early farm life did not produce in him the rude physique which distinguished another peasant painter, Jean François Millet.

His birthplace was near the village where Jeanne d'Arc was born, and he grew up among traditions of the Maid. His province, Lorraine, had given birth to another great artist, Claude le Lorrain; and whether the young boy heard of him or no, he very early developed a passion for art. Lorraine is a birthplace of great men, and Bastien was not the least.

His father used to make him draw whatever happened to be on the table at night — the lamp, book, etc. The family, however, had no idea of making him an artist, having planned that he should fit himself to take some administrative career.

At the age of eleven he was sent to the College of Verdun. This was hardly a college in the sense in which we use the word; rather, what is here called an academy. He was not a remarkable student, though he had a liking for mathematics; but it was in the drawing-class that he distinguished himself. His correctness of eye and skill of hand were considered remarkable. When he had gone through the college he announced his desire to be an artist; and though this was a shock to his parents, who had made other plans for him, they, in the end, consented. A place was found for him in the Central Postal administration, and it was arranged that he should study at the École des Beaux-Arts during his leisure. This proved impossible. He gave up his place in the post-office, and at the cost of a good deal of privation continued his studies at the Beaux-Arts.

Bastien went through the regular training of the schools for a number of years. It is nowhere recorded that he was a very brilliant student, yet from

his early studies one sees that he must have been among the best of the school, even then. Among his fellow students were Dagnan Bouveret, the famous French painter; Baude, a well-known wood-engraver; Edelfeldt, Alden Weir, and others. The men used to congregate at a certain restaurant near-by, where food of very bad quality but appetizingly cooked was served. The good woman of the restaurant, it is said, trusted Bastien for many a month, and accepted many a sketch or picture in payment.

The Franco-Prussian War broke into this quiet, studious life, and Bastien, like so many other gallant young students at the time of the Siege of Paris, shouldered a musket and joined a company of artists, whose captain was the artist Castellani. It is not recorded that he was in any great battle or particularly distinguished himself, but no doubt he did his duty in the same dogged manner that distinguished his painting. He was hit on the forehead by a clod of earth thrown up by a shell, and so was in the hospital for the last months of the Siege. While he was there his first composition, a nude study, was destroyed by another shell.

When Bastien, after a short stay with his parents in Lorraine, came back to Paris he was ready to begin work again; but circumstances had so much changed that he had the greatest difficulty to get on at all. He secured an order from a maker of "antiphelis milk" to paint an advertisement of his brand; but though the picture was subsequently exhibited in the Salon, it did not please the manufacturer, who wanted the details of his business painted on the picture in gold-leaf.

Bastien was driven to all sorts of makeshifts in order to make a little money; and among these efforts were the drawings he made for a certain magazine. This magazine was in the habit of getting work from very clever youngsters for very small sums. Many of these young men could do a very chic illustration quite out of their head in a very short time. It was wholly impossible for Bastien to do this. He had to work from models. And more, he rendered them so sincerely that the editors did not like his work because they thought it lacked *élan*. So that, while he did a few illustrations, he was not considered much of a success at it. Singular to think of one of the greatest artists of France who was not considered good enough to illustrate a twopenny trumpery paper!

The first work by Bastien to attract any attention was the famous 'Portrait of His Grandfather' (Plate x). This was begun in the summer of 1873. The portrait was very closely studied and highly finished, and had this peculiarity for that time: that it was painted outdoors in an outdoor light. It was criticized for being too much worked over, but one would now consider that to be its chiefest merit.

This portrait, even when first exhibited, made a great success. It seemed to many people who had never seen or had ignored the Impressionist movement a work of peculiar originality; and for the matter of that, although it was based on certain impressionistic ideas, the manner of its making was quite different. So, too, was the very high finish, which was one of the marked characteristics of the work. It is curious that a mere portrait should so quickly

make a man's reputation. But so it is. That is one of the essential differences between Paris and New York or Boston,—that Paris responds more quickly to great works of art. For this portrait the young artist received a third-class medal.

Theuriet describes Bastien at this time as follows: "I saw before me a young man plainly dressed, small, fair, and muscular; his pale face, with its square, determined brow, short nose, and spirituelle lips, scarcely covered by a blond moustache, was lighted up by two clear blue eyes whose straight, piercing look told of loyalty and of indomitable energy. There was roguishness, as well as manliness, in that mobile face with its flattened features, and a certain cool audacity alternated with signs of sensitiveness and sparkling fun and gaiety."

It was about this time that certain other very interesting works were made. One was a picture which various French writers say was in the style of Watteau. It was called 'Le Chanson de Printemps' ('A Spring Song'). It is difficult to see any resemblance to Watteau in this little peasant-girl with cupids about her; but it is a pretty fantasy, with a mixture of realism and imagination which rather surprises one in Bastien. Bastien became a realist from conviction, not because he lacked fancy or imagination. Indeed, it needs imagination of the highest sort to be a realist. This picture, which was exhibited at the same time as the 'Grandfather,' was bought by the government.

An event, the most dramatic in Bastien's life, took place the next year. He tried for the Prix de Rome and was admitted *en loge*, with nine other fortunate young men, to paint a picture in two months on the final subject given out for the prize. This subject was an excellent one for Bastien. It was 'The Angel of the Lord appearing to the Shepherds near Bethlehem and announcing the Birth of Christ.' Bastien made a delightful composition. His shepherds were rude, rough peasants such as he must have known in Lorraine. But the distinguishing mark of his picture was the angel. Instead of making the conventional or typical angel, he imagined a delightful, yet not impossible she, projected and painted with something of the naïveté and sincerity of a Memlinc or of a Gerard David. Apart from the fine, light effect and the sense of night about, the men were admirably indicated.

The pictures were exhibited, and the opinion of the students and the public indicated Bastien as the winner of the prize. When, however, the members of the Institute of France, probably influenced by various Beaux-Arts professors, came to award the prize, they gave it to a certain Léon Commerre, whose chief fame in after-years is that he won the Prix de Rome over Bastien-Lepage. Commerre was an older man. It was his last chance. He was nearly thirty, and if he did not get it that year he could never try again. So the committee, with engaging sympathy, awarded the scholarship to him. Something of the same sort occurred years before in the life of Jean François Millet.

But in Bastien's case the whole student-body were alive to what they considered the injustice of the award. They demonstrated as only Parisian students can. A young American student put a wreath of real laurel on Bastien's

picture, instead of the pinchbeck gilded wreath that adorned the picture of Comerre, and Bastien in a few days found himself the most talked of man in Paris.

'The Young Communian' (Plate ix), painted the same year, was another of Bastien's early successes, and was the seed of a whole crop of imitations. It is one of the first "white upon white" subjects which have been so much done of recent years. Whistler's 'White Girl' had been exhibited some years previously. Whether Bastien had ever seen it does not appear. This picture at the time was regarded as quite a triumph of subtle painting. To our more modern eyes it seems that some of the accents are too dark and that some of the peculiar difficulties of the subject are avoided or obviated. All the same, the little face is quite a triumph of good, solid painting; the gradations are subtle and well observed, and there is an indefinable charm about the picture which is difficult to precise, the result of absolute sincerity.

'Les Foins' (Plate vii), or 'The Haymakers,' made in 1878, was the first large picture which Bastien painted and exhibited. It will be further described in the analysis of pictures. But it may be said here that it represents two peasants resting at noon from making hay. The man is asleep, flat on his back. The woman, too tired to sleep, is gazing straight ahead with a look which may mean unutterable things or mere animal weariness. This picture is of great importance, not only as regards the life of Bastien, but in any résumé of French art in the nineteenth century. It was the ancestor of countless pictures painted in the next ten years. Indeed, almost every young and ambitious student of those next ten or fifteen years came under Bastien's virile and healthy influence.

Millet had indicated something of the same sort in his 'Grape-tender Resting,' but he had treated it in his monumental, typical way from memory, whereas the work of Bastien was for that time the last word of observation and of realism. Courbet had treated labor in a more realistic way than Millet, in his 'Stone-breakers,' but that, to our eyes, seems very black and brown for outdoor work. It is realistic in drawing, but conventional in color. The tradition of Caravaggio and the Italian realists overshadows it. Whereas 'Les Foins,' even to-day, despite certain errors, seems very much like our idea of what outdoor effects should be.

This picture really put Bastien at the head of the realistic movement in France. Of course, Manet, Monet, and other Impressionists were in full activity at the same time; but it is impossible for the people who were not interested in art at that time to realize how little they were regarded at that period. They were considered, in all seriousness, by many intelligent people to be either quite crazy or the maddest sort of charlatans.

Just how far Bastien himself was influenced by Manet is a difficult thing to say. The Impressionists were very bitter about his work, claiming that he stole everything from them. Degas, who has a genius for bitter, pithy sayings, called him "Bouguereau with modern improvements." But it is not difficult to make out a case for Bastien. Manet only began to paint outdoor effects in his later manner about 1871-1872. His early outdoor pictures are

as black as the ace of spades. And it was only when he became one of the famous Batignolles group that he began to paint "clair." Moreover, study of nature outdoors was in the air. Every one was doing it. The Pre-Raphaelites had begun to do it fifteen or twenty years before. Millet's later pastels had suggested it. Landscape-painters were painting more and more in the open, and it was no unnatural thing that a serious young student like Bastien should put a model in the open and try to paint the thing just as it looked, with no particular thought of Manet or of any one else.

The next year (1879) he painted his remarkable portrait of 'Sara Bernhardt' (Plate v). Nothing shows the versatility of the man more than this. 'Les Fois' was serious, almost stodgy work; the character was peasant-like and serious; even the color was gray and dull. The picture of the young actress, on the other hand, erect and rigid with nervous energy, is the last word of brilliancy and cleverness. Nothing could be more *raffiné* than the pose and the skilful handling with which the subject is rendered. This picture had a great *succes d'estime*, but does not seem to have brought Bastien many orders. Indeed, his observation and rendering were so remorseless that many persons shrank from putting their personalities in his power.

The critic Albert Wolff had taken Bastien under his wing, as it were, and, to use the graphic American slang, "boomed" his work consistently. It is hard for one who did not know how things went at that time to realize the power of this critic. While no man can wholly make or break a great artist, there can be no doubt that Wolff's thick and thin praise was of great assistance to Bastien. Our artist in gratitude painted a portrait of Wolff (Plate III), which is said to have taken forty sittings. It is of singular ugliness, and Wolff must have regarded the gift with mixed feelings. Some of Bastien's friends or enemies did not like his complaisance to the great critic, and when some one at the exhibition praised the high finish of the picture a wag replied (having in mind the studio phrase of "licked" for too smooth finish), "Yes, but the boots look licked."

Bastien's 'Portrait of the Prince of Wales,' now King of England, was painted about 1880. It is a skilful and decorative work, evidently inspired by Holbein or Clouet, which, with all its cleverness, lacks, it may be, something of the unaffectedness and naïveté of some of his other work. There exists a very careful pencil-study for this portrait, which was in profile. Near it, in the corner of the paper, is an astonishing caricature of the subject in full face, as if Bastien had said, in showing the study to a friend, "This is how he really looks," and had sketched in the little character-study.

We hear a great deal about the friendship of Bastien with Marie Bashkirtseff; and various writers, Muther among others, assume that Bastien was in love with her. This may or may not be, but there is no particular reason to assume it. The fair Bashkirtseff, as we find in her diary, had a passion for making out that every man she met was in love with her. She was greatly interested in Bastien's work and in his personality, and no doubt he, on his part, was flattered by the interest of an extremely pretty woman who was something of the *grande dame* as well. At all events, her friendship was a

solace to him in the pain and suffering which came to him at the end of his too short life.

For it came to pass that Bastien, just at the height of his power, when he felt himself more than ever able to express himself and was full of ideas for pictures, was attacked by a terrible disease, which rapidly sapped his strength. He worked in these last days with a feverish energy, as if to produce as much as possible in the short time he had left. He traveled, went to various places for the benefit of his health, but with no success. He died in Paris, December 10, 1884, in the thirty-seventh year of his age.

The picture by which we in America best know Bastien is the 'Jeanne d'Arc' (Plate 1), and, taken all in all, it is probably his best work. It is a subject he had long held in his mind. He worked long and earnestly at it, and was much disappointed when it did not receive the *Medaille d'Honneur*. It has certain obvious defects, but it is undeniably a picture which is original and powerful in composition and which is painted with remarkable skill.

One is perhaps better able to make a right estimate of Bastien now than immediately after his death. Then he was possibly overestimated; now, one hardly hears of him enough. The art world, for a long time, has been dominated by talents like Whistler's or Sargent's, and to some extent by the Impressionists. But it seems unlikely that such admirably solid, well-observed work as that of Bastien should always pass unnoticed. It will come back to its own, and we shall once again realize its sincerity, its intensity, and its character.

When one comes to analyze his various qualities one finds, to begin with, that his drawing was admirable. It was correct and at the same time very personal. It may be said that he was not a great draftsman in any such sense as was Ingres or even Delaunay. But then, he seldom drew the nude. Such studies as exist in this way lead one to think that he might have done remarkable work in this direction. On the other hand, his sense of character was remarkable. He made shapes of things with singular accuracy, and he had an intensity of vision which made his work different from that of others.

Bastien was hardly a colorist at all — in the sense, for instance, that were the Venetians. He does not, as did they, arrange bouquets of glowing color, in which every patch apart from its own color has some bearing on the color-effect of the whole. Having hit upon a particular *motif*, as in 'Les Foins,' he painted it just as it came — the dull black or brown of the clothes, the grimy red of the hands and faces, the dead, almost colorless, green of the hay. There was no attempt to improve on nature, either in the arrangement of color or in the quality of color selected. At the same time, the quality of his color is often very agreeable; never, one may say, crude or bad.

Some of his pictures, for instance the exquisite 'Sara Bernhardt,' lead one to feel that he had in him the makings of a colorist. But his choice of subject sometimes prevented the possibility of his introducing a very full chord of color. This may point to one of his limitations, at least to one of his peculiarities. He selected a motive primarily from the character there was in it,

rather than from its color. Given the motive, he then expressed the color with distinction, gravity, refinement, rather than with charm or passion.

His palette was very simple. He used much the same colors he had learned to use in the Beaux-Arts. He employed yellow ochre, *brun rouge* or light red, vermillion, *verte emerande*, the same thing as our viridian, cobalt blue and French ultramarine, the umbers, and siennas, black and white. An American landscape-painter who worked with him outdoors told the present writer that Bastien, even when trying to render brilliant effects like sunlight, only used yellow ochre, not allowing himself to use the more brilliant cadmium or chrome, nor yet madder like *Garance rose*.

Bastien has been criticized, notably in the ‘Jeanne d’Arc,’ for a certain spottiness observable in his work; that is, although his paintings almost always “carry” well, they sometimes do so through power of design or pattern rather than from the simplicity of the “values” or tone-relations. In other words, his passion for and intense interest in detail was such that he did not always get the strongest effect while rendering this detail. Perhaps it was that he allowed the edges of different masses in his work to remain about equally sharp, so that one does not get the proper sense of the eye focusing more sharply on the important crucial part of the picture than on the less essential elements. In the ‘Jeanne d’Arc’ he pushes this, possibly intentionally, to an extreme, so that one gets a sense of the orchard garden existing about or behind the girl as a sort of tapestry made of hundreds of minute threads or flat masses of color. The effect is not unfortunate in this picture, as it suits not badly the mystical, mediæval character of the subject.

This picture, by the way, shows in an interesting way how realism in certain subjects when pushed to an extreme may, must, lead to mysticism. Here is a mystical subject, treated in a purely realistic way, and yet, through the intense, icy realism of the painting of the face, one is led to perceive its mystic significance. This face, most of all these eyes, so rigorously rendered, turn as we gaze, from being those of the rude peasant-girl of Domrémy, so that we look into the inspired face and eyes of the maid who saw before her Saint Mary and Saint Denis and Saint Margaret calling to her to do battle and suffer martyrdom for France.

We spoke for a moment of his design as helping out his tone-effect. This is particularly so in the ‘Jeanne d’Arc,’ where the “pattern” of the thing is so firm as to overcome any possible spottiness of effect. Again, the design of his ‘Sara Bernhardt’ is admirable. The spaces are well filled and yet in an original way. It is curious, however, that though Bastien’s design usually turns out well, he does not always seem to have known in beginning a picture just the shape which he meant it to have. For instance, in making his ‘Jeanne d’Arc’ he started with the picture half its present size — only the Maid and a bit of garden about her. Then he decided to introduce the figures of the saints, and sewed on as much again of canvas.

Gesture seems at times almost the same thing as the design of a picture. It is, perhaps, the shape of the culminating piece of the design. The ‘Jeanne

d'Arc,' for instance, is wholly dominated by the pathetic and, in art, original gesture of the Maid. Again, in the 'Sara Bernhardt,' it is the wonderful gesture of the actress, so uncommon, so affected, so unconscious, that gives the picture its unique quality. In looking through his work one feels the gesture of some figures more unique, more admirably expressive, than that of others. Yet, even in a figure as the woman of 'Les Fois,' where at first sight the action seems a little commonplace, like any one else, one finds that gesture is never forgotten. When one thinks of the painting one pictures in one's mind first the pathetic stoop of shoulders, the listless laying of hands upon the lap.

A great deal has been made of Bastien's debt to Manet, and yet any likeness there may be between them is purely a surface one, having to do, for the most part, with the choice of *motif*. In one particular way the two men differed greatly. Manet was, so to say, the inventor of "painting flat." Either from inability to model or because he felt that he gained greater force of effect by not cutting up his masses, he tended, especially in faces, to give them something the effect of bas-reliefs, the modulations being slightly indicated but not achieved. With Bastien it was quite otherwise. No matter how subtle his effect, how much it depended on well-balanced masses of tone, he risked everything in carrying the modulations, especially in the faces, as far as they would go. One notes this especially in the 'Communiante,' where a less courageous man might have tried to undermodel the forms in the face, in the fear that he would destroy the delicate color-difference of the ensemble. Bastien grimly models the form as far as he can, and in the particular instance triumphs notwithstanding.

Bastien's technique was the simplest thing imaginable; that is, there was no underpainting in gray, or some other color, nor was there any glazing; that is, rubbing transparent colors over the first painting. Still less was there any rubbing on of "sauce," nor were the colors kept in tone by a binding color, as happens even with Velasquez. Bastien deliberately denied himself these resources or aids of which all the old masters had availed themselves. He painted very directly, and then if the results did not please him he scraped it out and painted it over again. This gave his work great freshness. On the other hand, it caused his critics to call some of his work, especially the 'Jeanne d'Arc,' "spotty." So, indeed, it was, but that was one of the defects of its admirable qualities.

Bastien's handicraft varied with the problem in hand. For instance, in certain sketches, compositions for the Beaux-Arts, etc., he painted with a square brush very broadly, indicating only the essentials. In large Salon pictures, like the 'Jeanne d'Arc' or 'Les Fois,' while the touch is still large and broad, it is no longer square. An effort is made to let the shape of each brush-stroke give something of the shape or character of the high-light, the accent, or the reflection that is represented. In this, Bastien was quite different from many men who were painting at the same time, who, for their part, were a good deal influenced by him. There was at that time, among the younger artists of Paris, a sort of mania for the square-touch manner or the

square-brush style (as it was indifferently called). This method came from the careful study of Franz Hals's work, and was a sort of reaction from the sloppy bituminous work of Romanticists. The reason for its being was an effort to paint honestly, directly, and in a craftsmanlike way; and while it was carried to absurd lengths by some of its partisans, it was no bad training for a man if he did not do it too long. Bastien, however, except in his sketches, never painted in this way. He extracted the good from it and avoided some of its evils.

When he did little pictures, such as the 'Sara Bernhardt' or the 'Albert Wolff,' he seems to have worked in a rather different way. There is good authority for saying that he put his picture in with very small brushes and kept on working in an almost meticulous way. Indeed, it would be impossible to attain to the extreme finish which he got in any other way. When he did not like a piece and wished to paint over it, besides scraping it out, he sometimes rubbed a little black on it in order to force himself to paint all over that part, leaving no underpainting to show through. Although he was naturally a very rapid and skilful executant, he worked for days and days on bits before he was satisfied. Albert Wolff tells us that Bastien painted for forty sittings on his portrait of Wolff himself.

Certain of Bastien's heads, the 'Jeanne d'Arc,' for instance, have been scraped out and repainted so often as to have taken on an enameled look. They seem almost like some plaque delicately modeled in bas-relief. This way of doing led to apparently different styles in different parts of the canvas. The heads, instead of being *impasto*, were sometimes the smoothest part of the canvas, while certain leaves of a tree, or a dandelion painted *alla prima*, would be very heavy and rough in texture. It was things like these that irritated many of Bastien's critics, who thought them affectations. Yet they came about perfectly simply, without premeditation. When a difficult part like a head would not "come" he simply scraped and rescraped till some repainting satisfied him. On the other hand, if some detail, like a trunk or a mass of leaves, gave the desired look the first time he merely left it just as it was, however rough.

Despite his sincerity, he sometimes had curious lapses. His whole doctrine was to paint the aspect of the thing just as it appeared, and still, in certain of his pictures, as, for instance, 'Les Foins,' it is impossible to tell whether he meant the picture to be a gray day or in sunlight. Some critics have praised this particular picture as representing blinding sunlight, and yet, when one comes to look it over, there is no sunlight about it. Not only does the method not suggest sunlight, but one sees from the diffused light, the absence of shadows, that it is gray day effect. Yet the sky is quite blue, except for a few small clouds. Then it is evident that the real effect must be that of a cloud over the sun. But that is a very transitory effect. At best one would get only a few hours, a score or more, of that effect in a summer. But Bastien used to paint all summer, day in and day out, on his figures. The conclusion one arrives at is that he must have posed his models in a courtyard where the sun did not reach them, though they are supposed to be in an open

field — a harmless enough subterfuge. Only, as Bastien's great rallying-cry was absolute sincerity before nature, one sees that he had, nevertheless, his own lapses.

It is a truism that whenever a great man arises a swarm of imitators are bred, who often imitate peculiarities and failings rather than the essential spirit of the master. Thus we have the painting of Giorgione and the Giorgionesque. There is Rembrandt and the Rembrandtesque; and in Bastien's case it happened, in a very short space, that he had many imitators. Some of these were men of surprising cleverness, only they appropriated the by-products, as it were, of Bastien rather than the refined gold he strove to produce.

There arose the "chic" or smart manner of Bastien, and clever fellows learned how to paint, in a few days, what looked a good deal like a picture on which Bastien might have spent six months. Bastien's skill of hand was remarkable. He seldom allowed this skill to show. He was content that the signs of his craftsmanship should dissipate in continued repainting, if only he might make his figure a little more like nature. It is in his small pictures that his brilliant craftsmanship is particularly manifest.

Bastien himself said somewhere that concentration was the secret of good art; and however that may be, it is certain that concentration is one of the secrets of his own art. When he was working he could not endure that any one should whistle or sing. He himself never, while at work, uttered an unnecessary word, but kept with a single mind at the pursuit in hand. His idea after gaining his general effect was to make the pieces as absolute as possible.

Character — that is the word that sums up Bastien's finest qualities. The search for character and the rendering of it are the things that give his work a peculiar personality; and with it — the result, it may be, of the peculiar intensity which he put into his work — went a curious quality of life. Others have tried to achieve the look of life by bold, dashing painting, or by violent action of the figure; but Bastien, painting figures for the most part inert, with no bravura, achieved through sheer intensity of vision and incisiveness of rendering this singular quality of vitality.

The Art of Bastien-Lepage

GEORGE CLAUSEN

FROM 'JULES BASTIEN-LEPAGE AND HIS ART — A MEMOIR'

THE work of Bastien-Lepage ranks, to my mind, with the very best in modern art. He brought to us what was in some ways a new view of nature — one whose truth was at once admitted, but which was nevertheless the cause of much discussion and criticism. It was objected to mainly, I think, as not being in accord with established rules, but nevertheless the objectors expressed their admiration for the skill of the painter; while, on the other hand, for those who accepted him (chiefly the younger men, these), no praise was too great, no admiration too enthusiastic.

It is only a few years since his untimely death was mourned as a loss to the whole art-world; for his whole career is so recent that his fellow students are still young men, many of them only now beginning to obtain full recognition, and yet it is perhaps long enough ago to enable his work to be considered as a whole, and his place in the art-movement to be seen. For although he was an innovator, and one showing in all he did a strong individuality, the general direction of his genius was given him by the artistic tendencies of his time.

It will be generally admitted that if painting has made any advance in our days, if it shows in any direction a new departure, or fresh revelation of the beauty that exists throughout nature, it is in the development of the problems which have arisen from the study of landscape and of the effects of light. There now prevails a close and sincere study of nature, founded on the acceptance of things as they are, and an increasing consciousness on the part of artists (or perhaps it would be more correct to say an increasing courage on the part of artists to express their conviction) that a picture should be the record of something seen, or some impression felt, rather than be formally constructed. And men have awakened at length to see that all nature is beautiful, that all light is beautiful, and that there is color everywhere; that the endeavor to realize truly the natural relation of people to their surroundings is better than to follow unquestioning on the old conventional lines. This is, roughly speaking, the modern standpoint, and it cannot be denied that it is an enormous advance on the accepted artistic ideals of thirty or forty years ago. And to the men who have brought this about — to the Pre-Raphaelite brotherhood; to Millet, Corot, Rousseau, Courbet, Manet, and Mr. Whistler — to all those who have fought the battle and to whom our present clearer outlook is due, we owe a lasting debt of gratitude.

It is a little surprising now, that the work of Bastien-Lepage, based as it is on the simple acceptance of nature, should have caused so much discussion on its first appearance. For time has justified him: we feel, on comparing his work with other men of his time, that it marks a new departure, and we realize that it has helped to form our present standpoint. But as the majority of people tune their eyes by pictures and not by nature, and only admire in nature that which is made manifest to them by their artistic prophet, it may be taken as a compliment to a man of independent genius that when he discloses a fresh view of nature it is not for some time accepted. "Good gracious, sir!" said an eminent critic, referring to Claude Monet, "Like nature? Yes; of course it is like nature; but a man has no business to choose that aspect of it!" . . .

This love of nature, and resolute determination not to depart from the strict literal truth as he saw it, marks all the work of Bastien-Lepage. As far as it was possible for an artist nowadays, he appears to have been uninfluenced by the old masters. The only lesson he seems to have learnt from them was that nature, which sufficed for them, should suffice for him also. It is this attitude of mind which brings him into kinship with the early painters, and which led to his being styled "The primitive." He did not set out to form his art on the methods of the older painters, but going as they did, direct

to nature, he resolutely put on one side (as far as possible to one familiar with them) the accepted pictorial artifices. He seems to have set himself the task of going over the ground from the beginning; and the fact that his uncompromising and unconventional presentation of his subjects should be expressed by means of a most highly accomplished, very modern, and very elegant technique, was one of the things which, while it greatly charmed, at the same time puzzled and surprised people. It was so different from what had been seen, or might reasonably have been expected; and one can understand some critics feeling that a man so thoroughly master of his art, so consummate a painter, must be wilfully affected in the treatment of his subjects, his simple acceptance of nature appearing to them as a pose. But it was not long before he was understood; and one has only to read the very interesting memoir of M. Theuriet to see how mistaken his view was, and how simply and naturally his art developed from his early life and associations. It is seldom, indeed, that one finds an artist so completely adjusted to his surroundings—so much so that he is able to go back for his mature inspirations not only to his first impressions, but to the very scenes, and in some cases no doubt, the individuals who awakened them. As a rule, an artist nowadays is led in many directions before he finds himself. Bastien-Lepage had his doubts and hesitations, of course, but they were soon over, and almost from the start he seems to have decided on his path.

The advantage of this to him in his work must have been enormous, as any one who has painted in the country will know; for villages contain no surplus populations—every one has his work to do; and the peasant is slow to understand, and distrustful of all that lies outside his own experience; so that it is difficult, and in many cases impossible, for an artist to get models in a village. But we can imagine Lepage to have been friends with all his models, and that his pictures excited as lively an interest (though, of course, on different grounds) in Damvillers as in Paris; and it was, I think, due to some extent to this, as well as to his own untiring energy, that he was enabled to complete so much. As far as we are aware, he was unique among contemporary artists in being so happily circumstanced; and it is evidence of the simple sincerity of the man that he found his ideal in the ordinary realities of his own experience: feeling, no doubt, that beauty exists everywhere waiting for him who has eyes to see.

It has been frequently said of Bastien-Lepage that he had no feeling for beauty—or, at any rate, that he was indifferent to it; but as it is impossible to arrive at any satisfactory definition of beauty, this point cannot be discussed. Taking the word, however, in its obvious and generally accepted meaning, that of personal beauty, it seems to me that there is no fair ground for the charge; for such works as the ‘First Communion,’ the ‘Portrait of Sara Bernhardt,’ and ‘Joan of Arc,’ all show a most refined and delicate appreciation of personal beauty, and should surely have led his critics to consider whether the man who painted them had not very good reasons for painting people who were not beautiful, too. For all work cannot be judged from one point of view; we recognize that a work of art is the outcome of a personal

impression, and that the artist's aim is to give expression to his views; and the deeper his insight into nature the greater the result. And yet, curiously enough, the fact that Bastien-Lepage's insight into nature was exceptionally deep and wide renders it difficult to form a clear judgment, as his work appears equally from different points of view. His love of beauty, for instance, seems to go hand in hand with psychological or even pathological interest; and this equal prominence of different tendencies is a very puzzling element in his work. We expect an artist to give us a strongly personal view; but here is one who gives us something very like an analysis, and whose personal view it is impossible to define — and the premature ending of his career leaves it now forever doubtful which was the strongest bias of his mind. It seems to me that his sympathies were so wide as to try and include everything, and that he has helped to widen the bounds of beauty, by showing its limitless possibilities. The words of Blake, "To see a world in a grain of sand, and heaven in a wild-flower," suggest, I think, his general feeling towards nature.

In spite of the wide range of his work and the extraordinary versatility of his execution, he kept, as a rule, within certain limitations of treatment. He did not care for the strong opposition of light and shadow, and he seems almost to have avoided those aspects of nature which depend for their beauty on the changes and contrasts of atmosphere and light. All that side of nature which depends on memory for its realization was left almost untouched by him, and yet it is idle to suppose that so richly gifted a man could not have been keenly sensible of all nature's beauty; but I think he found himself hedged in by the conditions he sought. For in painting a large figure-picture in the open air, the painter must almost of necessity limit himself to the effect of gray open daylight. This he realized splendidly; at the same time it may be said that he sought elaboration of detail perhaps at the expense of effect, approaching nature at times too much from the point of view of still-life. This is not felt in his small pictures, in which the point of view is so close that the detail and general effect can be seen at the same time; but in his large works much that is charming in the highest degree when examined in detail, fails to carry its full value to the eye at a distance necessary to take in the whole work. This is the case with 'Joan of Arc' in the Paris Exhibition of two years ago (1890); and it was instructive to compare this picture with Courbet's 'Stone-breakers,' which hung near it on the same wall. Courbet had generalized as much as possible — everything was cleared away but the essentials; and at a little distance Courbet showed in full power and completeness, while the delicate and beautiful work in 'Joan of Arc' was lost, and the picture flat and unintelligible in comparison. No doubt Bastien-Lepage worked for truth of impression and of detail too, but it is apparently impossible to get both; and this seems to show that the building-up or combining a number of facts, each of which may be true of itself and to others, does not in its sum total give a general impression of truth. It is but a number of isolated truths. Bastien-Lepage has carried his endeavor in this direction farther than any of his predecessors — in fact it may be said that he has carried literal representation to its extreme limit: so much so as to leave clearly discernible to us

the question which was doubtless before him, but which has at any rate developed itself from his work, whether it is possible to attain literal truth without leaving on one side much of that which is most beautiful in nature? And further, the question arises, whether literal truth is the highest truth. For realism, as an end in art, leads nowhere; it is an *impasse*. Surely it is but the means to whatever the artist has it in him to express.

I feel convinced that realism was not the end with Bastien-Lepage. I believe that his contribution to art, great as it was, and covering as it does an amount of work which might well represent a whole life's work instead of the work of a few short years, was but the promise of his full power, and that, had he lived, his work would have shown a wider range of nature than that of any other artist, except perhaps Rembrandt. But it was not to be.

W. C. BROWNELL

‘FRENCH ART’

COURBET has but one rival among realistic painters. I mean, of course, Bastien-Lepage. There is an important difference between the two. In Courbet the sentiment of reality dominates the realism of the technique. In Bastien-Lepage the technique is realistically carried infinitely farther, but the sentiment quite transcends realism. Imagine Courbet essaying a ‘Jeanne d'Arc!’ Bastien-Lepage painting Courbet's ‘Cantonniers’ would not have stopped, as Courbet has done, with expressing their vitality, their actual interest; but at the same time that he represented them in far greater technical completeness he would also have occupied himself with their psychology. He is indeed quite as distinctly a psychologist as he is a painter. His favorite problem, aside from that of technical perfection, which perhaps equally haunted him, is the rendering of that resigned, bewildered, semi-hypnotic, vaguely and yet intensely longing spiritual expression to be noted by those who have eyes to see it in the face and attitudes now of the peasant laborer, now of the city pariah. All his peasant women are potentially Jeannes d'Arc —‘Les Foins,’ ‘Tired,’ ‘Petite Fauvette,’ for example. The “note” is still more evident in the ‘London Bootblack’ and the ‘London Flower-girl,’ in which the outcast “East End” spiritlessness of the British capital is caught and fixed with a Zola-like veracity and vigor. Such a phase as this is not so much pictorial or poetic as psychological. Bastien-Lepage's happiness in rendering it is a proof of the exceeding quickness and sureness of his observation; but his preoccupation with it is equally strong proof of his interest in the things of the mind as well as in those of the senses. This is his great distinction, I think. He beats the realist on his own ground (except perhaps Monet and his followers — I remember no attempt of his to paint sunlight), but he is imaginative as well. He is not, on the other hand, to be in any wise associated with the Romanticists. Degas's acid characterization of him as “the Bouguereau of the modern movement” is just only if we remember what very radical and fundamental changes the “modern movement” implies in general attitude as well as in special expression. I should be inclined, rather, to apply the analogy to M. Dagnan-Bouveret, though here, too, with many reserves, looking mainly to the difference between true and vapid sentiment.

It is interesting to note, however, the almost exclusively intellectual character of this imaginative side of Bastien-Lepage. He does not view his material with any apparent sympathy, such as one notes, or at all events, divines, in Millet. Both were French peasants; but whereas Millet's interest in his fellows is instinctive and absorbing, Bastien-Lepage's is curious and detached. If his pictures ever succeed in moving us, it is impersonally, in virtue of the camera-like scrutiny he brings to bear on his subject, and the effectiveness with which he renders it, and of the reflections which we institute of ourselves, and which he fails to stimulate by even the faintest trace of a loving touch or the betrayal of any sympathetic losing of himself in his theme. You feel just the least intimation of the *doctrinaire*, the systematic aloofness of the spectator. In moral attitude as well as in technical expression he no more assimilates the various phases of his material, to reproduce them afterward in new and original combination, than he expresses the essence of landscape in general, as the Fontainebleau painters do even in their most photographic moments. Both his figures and his landscapes are clearly portraits — typical and not merely individual, to be sure, but somehow not exactly creations. His skies are the least successful portions of his pictures, I think; one must generalize easily to make skies effective, and perhaps it is not fanciful to note the frequency of high horizons in his work.

The fact remains that Bastien-Lepage stands at the head of the modern movement in many ways. His friend M. André Theuriet has shown, in a brochure published some years ago, that he was himself as interesting as his pictures. He took his art very seriously, and spoke of it with dignity rather uncommon in the atmosphere of the studios, where there is apt to be more enthusiasm than reflection. I recall vividly the impatience with which he once spoke to me of painting "to show what you can do." His own standard was always the particular ideal he had formed, never within the reach of his ascertained powers. And whatever he did, one may say, illustrates the certainty and elevation of this remark, when one's mood inclines one to care most for this psychological side — undoubtedly the more nearly unique side — of his work, or for such exquisite things as his 'Forge' or the 'Portrait of Mme. Sara Bernhardt.' Incontestably he has the true tradition, and stands in the line of the great painters. And he owes his permanent place among them not less to his perception that painting has a moral and significant, as well as a representative and decorative sanction, than to his perfect harmony with his own time in his way of illustrating this — to his happy fusion of art admirably rendered with profound and stimulating suggestion.

The Works of Bastien-Lepage

'Jeanne d'Arc'

PLATE I

BASTIEN himself considered the ‘Jeanne d’Arc’ one of his finest performances, and was much disappointed when it did not, at first, receive the same amount of praise that some of his previous performances had gained. He felt that he had well expressed the character of the Maid; and, true enough, every one who now thinks of Jeanne thinks of her as Bastien portrayed her.

The head of this figure is one of the few faces in historical painting which show real insight and attention to detail. Although the gesture of the figure is remarkable, and typical of the character, it is really the face which most expresses the idea of the picture. While the painting of the rest of the picture is adequate and, indeed, remarkable in its interesting and original rendering of detail, it has been criticized as being “spotty.” But the surprising thing about it is that, while this criticism is not unjust, it still cannot be denied that the background does not interfere with the figure. The appeal of face and gesture are so overpowering that one’s eye constantly reverts to them, and it is with difficulty that one forces one’s self, after a while, to study this background, which is so remarkable, so full of well-made detail, that it would overpower a weaker figure.

The picture has also been criticized because the saints, instead of being before Jeanne’s eyes, where she could see them, are behind her. Bastien at first painted the picture half its present size, with only the figure of Jeanne and a bit of garden. Later he had sewn on another bit of canvas as large again. The saints are introduced partly for decorative effect and partly, it may be, to increase the sense of illusion. It is nowhere said that Jeanne saw the saints. She heard their voices, but her mystical, hypnotic gaze is explained to us by the half-seen presence of the spirits.

'Love in the Village'

PLATE II

‘LOVE IN THE VILLAGE’ was the latest large and important canvas that Bastien painted. It is more sentimental than his earlier works, and yet the sentiment is controlled by a sense of humor. The attitude of the lovesick swain and the girl

“Wholly fain, yet half afraid”

is well conceived, and as an ironic, yet tender, illustration, the thing is admirable. Perhaps it is not so interesting in *facture* as are some of the painter’s early work, although the treatment is everywhere adequate and interesting.

Bastien had the idea of painting a sort of cycle of the various hopes and joys of peasant life. At the time of his death he had made many studies for a picture to be called ‘Interment of a Young Girl at Damvillers.’ A burial takes place in the time of apple-blossoms, and the contrast between the

spring's young life about the mourners and the dead young life before us is made in a very effective, even if slightly, obvious manner. The 'Love in the Village' was another one of the same style, only in this Bastien has been able to push the thing to his usual high finish.

'PORTRAIT OF ALBERT WOLFF'

PLATE III

ALBERT WOLFF early took Bastien under his wing and championed his cause early and late. Wolff, though he had something of the allure of a *Boulevardier*, was hardly what one would call an austere soul. He made one think of Aretino, who would write a poem in a painter's praise in hope of being presented with a portrait. If this were received, he would puff the painter to some ducal friend and later sell him the picture at a good price. In the same way Wolff always expected a picture from the man he puffed, and no doubt this portrait was an offering of gratitude from Bastien. If it were a forced offering, the painter certainly had revenge from the way he painted the famous critic. He cannot be said to have flattered him. Not only is the head almost revoltingly ugly,—and this, to be sure, was quite in character,—but the pose also, with the big foot sticking out, is almost grotesque. At the same time, the picture is strongly painted. It is evidently the exact likeness of the man. And even the queer things in it tend to intensify one's impression of the famous critic's character.

'THE ANGEL APPEARING TO THE SHEPHERDS'

PLATE IV

THIS 'THE ANGEL APPEARING TO THE SHEPHERDS,' while not so remarkable as some of Bastien's later work, is included here because it is very characteristic of him, and because it played an important part in his career. This is the picture with which he so nearly won the *Prix de Rome*. It was considered very realistic and unacademic in its day. To us it seems to have a good deal of the Schools about it. Still, the shepherds are admirably characterized and the little child-angel, which makes one think of the *naïf* messengers of Memling or of Van Eyck, is quite delightful.

The picture is agreeable in color, with its blue-black night sky and the brown skins of the shepherds contrasted against the blonde fairness of the child-angel. The picture, being painted *en loge*,—that is, in the small studio provided by the Beaux-Arts for the composition,—is necessarily somewhat lacking in the true effect of some of Bastien's works. At the same time, it is surprising to see how near the effect of night and firelight he has come.

'PORTRAIT OF SARA BERNHARDT'

PLATE V

OF all Bastien's many portraits, this is perhaps the most delightful. To begin with, the color-scheme, with its pale yellows and grayish whites, offers a very agreeable combination to the eye. Then the design is handsome. The placing and action of the figure are simple and yet original. The divine Sara's character is well indicated; and yet, at the same time, she is made extremely pretty. One would not say that this picture was flattered, but certainly every bit of beauty the law allows has been allotted to her. The

Semitic touch in her make-up is well brought out, yet not in a cynical or unsympathetic manner. One feels that a very remarkable woman is before us, full of temperament, passion, and genius.

The little statue of Orpheus which the actress holds in her hands is not, as many have supposed, a piece of bric-à-brac belonging to her, but was modeled by Bastien himself to serve in this particular picture. He also made a drawing for the statuette which is full of remarkable and subtle qualities. Bastien modeled a few other things, among them a bronze head of his father.

'THE POTATO HARVEST'

PLATE VI

THIS 'THE POTATO HARVEST' is a sort of companion piece to 'Les Fоins.' Perhaps it is not so original in conception as 'Les Fоins,' still, it has many excellent bits of painting. The girl who is kneeling is cleverly made, although Bastien, who is generally very exact in his characterization, has in this case made his model look a little too much *Parisienne*. The central figure, who is filling a sack with potatoes, being in profile, does not present that psychological interest that one feels before many of Bastien's pictures painted in full face. It may be, indeed, that this is one of the reasons why this picture fails to grip one's sympathy so firmly as does 'Les Fоins' or 'Jeanne d'Arc.' Bastien has been accused by Mr. Walter Sickert of being a mere "painter of souls." As has been pointed out, this requires immense realism and technical endowment. Still, it must be admitted that Bastien's pictures do not, as do Millet's, attract one primarily by the large lines of their design. One knows perfectly well what the significance of one of Millet's figures is without looking at the face; one tells by the silhouette. Indeed, the face was often designedly obscured or modified. Bastien's figures were like the people around about us,—the face was everything; the rest, though well made, was distinctly secondary. This was not necessarily a fault, but it is pointed out as marking Bastien's difference from Millet, and indeed from most other painters.

'THE HAYMAKERS'

PLATE VII

LES FOINS,' or 'The 'Haymakers,' is one of Bastien's most famous pictures — partly because it has long hung in the Luxembourg Gallery, but partly, too, because it is the first of his large and important canvases, and as characteristic a one as he ever made. As so often happens in Bastien's pictures, the real interest is concentrated in one head, the woman's head. All the rest is merely accessory to this woman's wonderful face. While the man lies flat, *ancanti* with toil, the woman, too tired to rest, sits gazing at what? — nothing or everything, as you will. It was just Bastien's realism that enabled him to grasp the subtlety and mysticism of this face, and of so many other faces. The landscape, at the time of this picture's exhibition, was considered a marvel of realism. No one had ever painted hay that looked so much like hay. As compared to one of Millet's pictures, it is immensely realistic, although the effect is not very well achieved. The picture has often

been spoken of as flooded with sunlight, but it is evidently intended for the effect of clouds across the sun on a fair day.

THE BEGGAR*

PLATE VIII

THIS old beggar is one of those privileged characters that one often sees in the French Provinces. He somehow makes one think of Edie Ochiltree, the gabberlunzie of ‘Guy Mannering.’ De Maupassant has described one like him in his pathetic story of ‘The Beggar.’ This beggar, however, is rather different from the half-idiotic creature described in the story. This sturdy beggar has a malicious, almost sinister air, which suggests that he is perfectly well able to care for himself.

The composition of the picture appears at first sight to be quite unstudied; but on looking the thing over carefully, one perceives that the arrangement is really quite *soigné* and thought out. For instance, the way in which the dark geraniums tell against the white shutters is very effective. A pretty bit is the child’s head within; and further still one may see, if one peers deeply enough, the mother far inside the kitchen. The key-note of the composition, its reason for being, as in all Bastien’s compositions, is the face of the principal character. In this case it is studied with all his usual intensity; only it may be that this canny, malicious old countenance does not reach our sympathies or even our aesthetic sense, as does the head in ‘The Communiante’ or in ‘Les Fois.’ The picture is, however, one of Bastien’s dozen best performances.

THE YOUNG COMMUNIANTE*

PLATE IX

THE YOUNG COMMUNIANTE’ was considered very remarkable in its day, not only as a very delicate “white-upon-white” study, but also as a very acute analysis of character. The little face is studied with singular acuteness, and it seems as if no *nuance* of character had escaped the keen-eyed artist. One “amusing” little touch is the way in which the large, ill-fitting gloves are rendered. Somehow they are not ridiculous, but rather call attention to the simplicity and *naïveté* of the model. Bastien is said to have been himself almost unaware of the difficulties of his subject; and while the same sort of thing has often been done since, this remains one of the best.

PORTRAIT OF HIS GRANDFATHER*

PLATE X

THE ‘Portrait of his Grandfather’ was Bastien’s earliest success, and still remains one of his most interesting productions. To begin with, it is one of the first portraits painted in an outdoor light — at least, of modern times; for it is said that some of Piero della Francesca’s quaint yet masterly portraits were painted in an outdoor light. Also it is said that Zuccherino and others painted their famous portraits of Queen Elizabeth without a shadow by painting the queen in an outdoor light. Still, for modern times, this is a remarkably original portrait; and it is not only in its lighting that this portrait is original and fine, but also in its psychology, or, at least, in the close way in which the character is rendered.

LIST OF PAINTINGS BY BASTIEN-LEPAGE

SONG OF SPRING; Angel appearing to the Shepherds (Plate iv); Portrait of his Grandfather (Plate x); The Communante (Plate ix); Portrait of M. Hayem; Portrait of M. Wallon; Les Foins (Plate vii); Portrait of M. André Theuriet; The Potato Harvest (Plate vi); Portrait of M. Émile Bastien-Lepage; Portrait of the Prince of Wales; Portrait of Sara Bernhardt (Plate v); Jeanne d'Arc (Plate i); Portrait of Albert Wolff (Plate iii); The Flower Girl; The Forge; The Beggar (Plate viii); Pas Mèche; Love in the Village (Plate ii); Portrait of Madam Juliet Drouet.

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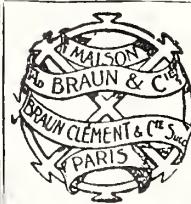
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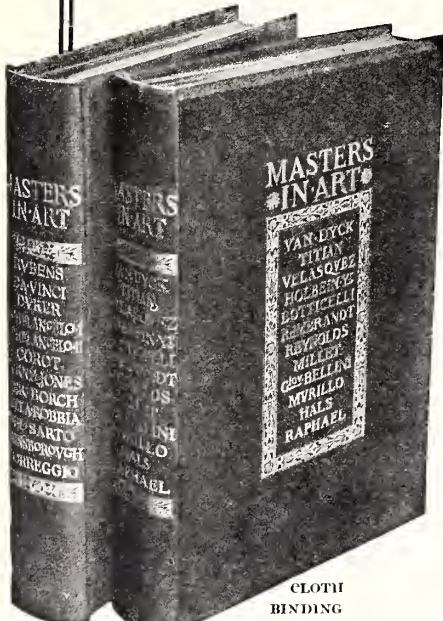
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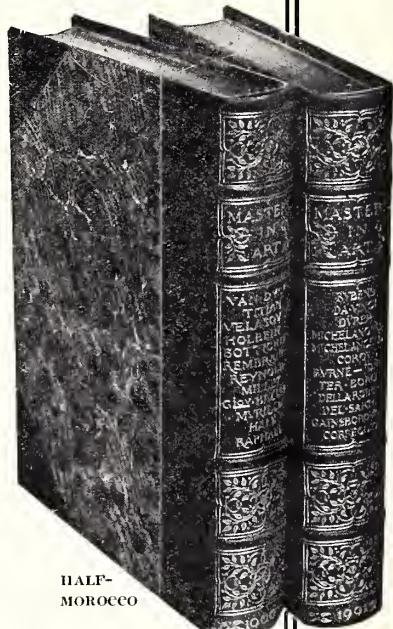
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